



Newsletter

May 2009

Government pressed to hold inquiry into construction of nuclear stations

The Guardian, 17th May 2009

- **Academics and green groups say system for assessing need is 'fatally flawed'**
- **Worries over leaving final decision on nuclear plants to Ed Miliband**

The government is under growing pressure to hold a public inquiry into building new nuclear stations amid claims that the current system of "justification" is fatally flawed and that public confidence in ministers is at an all-time low.

A group of leading academics has joined green pressure groups and others in demanding greater transparency. The justification process is required by the European Union as a high-level assessment to ensure the benefits of new-build nuclear stations outweigh potential detriments.

The academics, part of the Nuclear Consultation Group (NGC), have written to the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) calling for an inquiry, not least because the energy secretary, Ed Miliband, has made himself the final authority in the justification of new power stations, even though he has voiced support for building more atomic reactors.

Paul Dorfman, an academic at Warwick University and a spokesman for the NGC, said: "Given that justification, once finalised, may foreclose on any future discussion on issues crucial to nuclear power, it is vital that this process is opened up in order to allow for meaningful and realistic examination of evidence [in] a public forum.

"Because the justification of new nuclear power in the UK represents a key issue for trust in governance concerning energy policy and the control of radiation risk, we believe the government should hold an independent inquiry," he added.

The NCG, which is supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, argues that justification must be "thorough, transparent, neutral and independent". Some academics are considering legal action against the government if it fails to change the procedure. They are encouraged by a successful challenge by Greenpeace in the high court, which ruled that an earlier consultation on nuclear was lacking in independence. They also say the public feels that consultation over issues such as new runways at Heathrow is not genuine.

The DECC said it was taking the justification process very seriously and did not accept that Miliband was compromised, but it left the door ajar to allow for a change of tack. "There's an open consultation under way and thus far we don't believe there's also a need for an inquiry, but we'll keep that under review," a spokesman said. "The secretary of state's role in it is perfectly reasonable and he'll approach it in an open-minded and fair manner."

The NCG argues that once the justification process is over it becomes difficult to reopen major policy issues. The crowded schedule, however, means decisions may be rushed, it says. The government is in a hurry over nuclear

because of a perceived "energy crunch" after 2015 when many old reactors will be out of service, coal-fired plants will be closing and North Sea oil will be running down fast. EDF and other firms say they can build new atomic stations by 2017 but only if decision are not delayed.

The NGC is critical of many of the Nuclear Industry Association's arguments, dismissing claims that atomic power is low-carbon, a vital part of the energy mix and a domestic resource. The NGC believes that concentrating on wind, solar and wave projects could be a better strategy, while also noting nuclear power is dependent on uranium from overseas. The atomic industry is attacked for having "very high" opportunity costs and will suck investment out of renewables. It cites the example of AMEC selling off its wind energy subsidiary to put its efforts into Sellafield nuclear site, where it has just become a joint manager.

Dorfman and his colleagues, who also include Professor Keith Barnham from Imperial College and Professor Gordon Walker from Lancaster University, say nuclear has a history of cost over-runs at the expense of the taxpayer, noting the financial problems of British Energy and the £80bn cost of cleaning up atomic waste.

Sham nuclear site consultation

"Those that have tried to comment on the DECC website have found it almost impossible. The nomination documentation is lengthy and complex and comments are invited on very specific issues which most 'lay' people like myself will be unable to do. This makes a sham of the so-called public consultation."

Letter in Bristol Evening Post, 15 May

Safety threat to planned nuclear power stations

Independent on Sunday, 10 May 2009

- Devastating blow as leaked letter shows regulator could pull plug on proposed UK reactors because of 'design errors'
- Construction of the first EPR at the Olkiluoto site in Finland is already three years behind schedule

Britain's plans to build a new generation of nuclear power stations have been thrown into jeopardy by startling official safety fears. The nuclear regulatory body in Finland, where the first of the reactors is being built, has taken the extraordinary step of threatening to halt its construction because it has not been satisfied that key safety systems will work.

STUK, the Finnish government's Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority, says that "evident errors" have not been corrected more than a year after it raised its concerns and condemns the "lack of professional knowledge" of people working for the firm responsible for its design and construction.

This is an unexpected, and potentially devastating, blow because one of the main selling points of the new European Pressurised Reactor (EPR) has been that its safety systems will work far better than those in current reactors. It is particularly important that they do because, as The Independent on Sunday reported in February, they will produce many times as much radiation that could be rapidly released in the event of an accident.

EDF, the French electricity generator, plans to build at least four EPRs in Britain; two each are expected for existing nuclear sites at Sizewell in Suffolk and Hinkley Point in Somerset. It plans to let the first construction contracts this year and to have the first power station in operation by 2017. However, the first EPR, called Olkiluoto 3 – which is being built on an island in the Gulf of Bothnia, off western Finland – has

already been plagued with problems. It was supposed to begin operating this year but its construction is now three years behind schedule, vastly exceeding its original cost of €3bn.

The new crisis has been sparked by a leaked letter from Jukka Laaksonen, STUK's director general, to Anne Lauvergeon, the chief executive officer of the French nuclear company Areva, which has designed and is building the reactor, to express his "great concern" over "the design of the control and protection systems".

He said he first raised the issue in the spring of 2008, but "we have not seen expected progress in the work on the Areva side" adding that "the attitude or lack of professional knowledge" of some of the people representing the firm in expert meetings on the issue "prevents progress in resolving the concerns. Therefore evident design errors are not corrected and we are not receiving design documentation with adequate information." He warns: "Without a proper design that meets the basic principles of nuclear safety... I see no possibility of approving these important systems for installation. This would mean that the construction will come to a halt."

John Large, an independent nuclear consultant, describes the warning as "a hell of a damp towel for the reactor", and says that STUK's ultimatum shows that "it must consider the safety issue very serious indeed". The Health and Safety Executive, which will have to approve the EPR for use in Britain, is already liaising closely with STUK.

The letter was written last December, but a spokesman for STUK said late last week that, as far as he was aware, the situation had not changed since. Areva said it had sent some more files to the Finnish utility that will operate the power station, but admitted that "there are still some problems to solve".

EDF declined to comment.

Oldbury health risks are a concern

*Bristol Evening Post, lead letter
May 13th 2009*

Unfortunately, the report clearing Oldbury nuclear power station of health risks (Post, April 23) has some important problems. For example, it failed to look at figures in Chepstow, the nearest large population to Oldbury other than Thornbury.

The South West Public Health Observatory (SWPHO) said it examined cancers within 10km of the nuclear site but missed out Chepstow, which is eight kilometres away and was the subject of a leukaemia report by Dr Chris Busby in 2001 when childhood leukaemia was found to be 11 times the average. Visiting colleagues of mine from the Children of Chernobyl group have been concerned about the levels of cancer in Chepstow and Caldicott, which lie opposite and downstream of Oldbury.

Dr Busby also found 50 per cent extra breast cancer mortality downstream of the plant on the Gloucestershire and Avon side, while SWPHO looked both downstream and upstream, potentially diluting the figures. Prostate cancer mortality was found to be 37 per cent higher downwind of the plant and its aerial discharges. I don't believe the SWPHO has taken an intelligent view on where the likely health effects might occur.

Although the SWPHO report says the recent German study showing childhood leukaemia near every single nuclear power station cannot prove this is linked to their radioactive discharges, common sense suggests so. The problem is that the epidemiology does not match the predictions of The International Commission on Radiological Protection, which is under mounting pressure to

radically revise its advised safe doses to the industry.

More can be found at www.llrc.org. The pressurised water reactors (PWR) implicated with leukaemia in Germany discharge much more radioactive tritium than the small reactor at Oldbury does. This isotope, previously considered mild, is now thought to penetrate and damage DNA. Any new giant PWR reactors proposed for Oldbury will discharge this toxic waste, potentially adding to the cancer toll.

Jim Duffy, Shut Oldbury Campaign & Stop Hinkley, Bridgwater, Somerset

Chernobyl Day leafleting

Stop Hinkley campaigners gave out three hundred leaflets to mark Chernobyl Day on April 26th in Taunton High Street. Campaigners engaged with Saturday shoppers to discuss concerns about the EDF new build project at Hinkley Point, with the associated small but appalling risk of a serious accident. The leaflets included the following points:

- 23 years ago Chernobyl contaminated 21 percent of neighbouring Belarus and 1.5 million of its citizens with radiation.
- Chernobyl's plume was 200 times more radioactive than Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.
- All the surviving 100,000 liquidators are now reported ill.
- Hundreds have died.
- 1.3 million hectares of Belarus farmland is contaminated.
- Half the Chernobyl radiation contaminated Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.
- The other half spread over the rest of the world but was not officially studied.

- A 30 kilometre uninhabitable zone surrounds Chernobyl.
- Taunton is 25 kilometres from Hinkley Point.
- 374 UK farms, including 200,000 sheep, are still restricted
- 4,000 cancer deaths in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia were estimated in an IAEA/WHO press release in 2005 which was widely publicised.
- The actual WHO report predicted 9,000 cancer deaths in those countries.
- **30,000 to 60,000** cancer deaths worldwide were predicted by an alternative committee of scientists: The Other Report on Chernobyl (TORCH) 2006.

Events

Stop Hinkley AGM (rescheduled)

Presentation of the Severn Tidal Reef Scheme by Allan Jeffery

Monday 15th June, 7.30pm
West Bow House, Milton Place
off West Street, Bridgwater

**Meeting of nuclear regulators with
NGOs over new reactors, 25th June**

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